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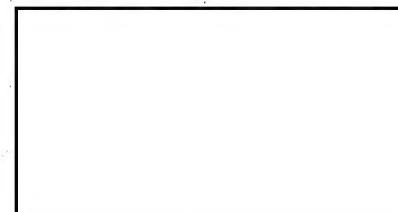
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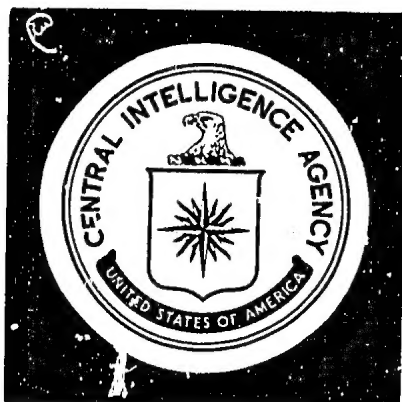
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE



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Intelligence Memorandum

CIA/OCT/2103/71

The Political Consequences of the Collapse of China II

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11 December 1971
No. 2103/71



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
11 December 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Political Consequences of the Collapse of Chenla IISummary

The collapse of the Chenla II campaign has had important political reverberations in Phnom Penh. For the past ten days, there has been considerable and sometimes acrimonious debate in the highest political circles in the capital about what went wrong on Route 6 and what changes need to be made. Army leaders are being blamed for recent military reverses by both high-ranking civilian leaders and their own junior officers, but most of the disaffection has centered on the figure of Prime Minister Lon Nol.

As the prime mover behind Chenla II, it was inevitable that the prime minister would be criticized when it failed. But the bitterness and potentially serious nature of the attack on Lon Nol stem not only from the Chenla II collapse but from long-standing displeasure with his capricious control over battlefield tactics and what is evidently perceived as his faulty grasp of the realities facing Cambodia. The current flux in the leadership situation in Phnom Penh is similar to that of last spring, when Lon Nol briefly stepped down.

There was then widespread disgruntlement over Lon Nol's deficiencies as a leader, but there also proved to be no other individual who could rally

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sufficient support to run the country. The impatience and sense of exasperation of people like Sirik Matak, Cheng Heng, and some military staff officers seem to be somewhat deeper this time, and, in contrast to last spring, the cutting edge of the discontent is a deteriorating military situation over which the Cambodians have only limited control. Moreover, Lon Nol himself appears to be dealing with criticism differently than last spring, when concern over his health led him to agree to turn over the government to others. This time he seems to be full of fight, denying that his management of the war has been counterproductive and telling his critics that in effect he intends to continue to do business the same way.

Lon Nol's intransigence and the apparent strain of irrationality currently manifest in his thinking create a volatile situation, for feeling appears to be running high among those who believe that some changes in his duties are essential. Sirik Matak is the most prominent and, because he is a resourceful, independent and strong-willed individual, the most important of Lon Nol's critics. A man who stood up to Sihanouk, Sirik Matak might carry through on his threat to quit if Lon Nol does not delegate more authority. If he did so, a governmental crisis would ensue that at a minimum would mean that Lon Nol would have to rule from an even more circumscribed base of power.

But power still seems to rest with Lon Nol. For all of his inadequacies, he still commands the affection and respect of most of his critics. There has been serious erosion of his power base in the army, but he probably can still count on the support of some key troop commanders if there is a showdown. The odds are that Lon Nol can face down his critics, if his will does not waver and if there are no other major military setbacks like Chenla II that completely undermine his authority.

He may be able to muddle through for several more months. No matter how the current power struggle comes out, the longer range prospect for political stability in Cambodia is not bright. Aside

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from Lon Nol, who is clearly slipping badly, no other political figure seems capable of either winning the support or emasculating the importance of the various factions without a struggle of possibly major dimensions.

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